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SUBJECT: Cultural Envoys Faulkner and Freeman Connect to Sri Lankan Youth

1. (U) SUMMARY: Culture Connect envoys Courtland Freeman and Omari Faulkner elicited extremely positive feedback among a rarely-reached segment of the youth audience during their three-day program in Sri Lanka October 11 to 14. The two basketball envoys reached hundreds of high school and college-aged students eager to absorb their training and meet authentic American sports stars. This program allowed the mission to open doors to schools and other institutions formerly absent from our contacts, and was magnified by laudatory features in the local press. End Summary.

2. (U) Cultural envoys Courtland Freeman and Omari Faulkner did an outstanding job connecting to hundreds of students and youth in Sri Lanka through three days of clinics, workshops, games and media interviews. More than 200 students and young basketball players from the national teams -- both men and women -- participated in workshops and clinics during the envoys' program. They also conducted a theoretical workshop with national and regional coaches in which they successfully conveyed different styles and approaches to coaching basketball.

3. (U) All the players the envoys worked with were genuinely thrilled to be receiving such high-level coaching, and observers noticed marked improvement in their technique and skills after just one two-hour workshop. Faulkner and Freeman were professional, courteous, patient and culturally sensitive, winning over their audience at every session.

4. (U) The pair also gave several media interviews in which they emphasized the theme of people connecting through basketball, a universal game. A report appeared on the Sri Lankan national TV news and several laudatory articles have appeared, with the largest and most detailed appearing in the October 15th English newspaper The Island, along with a couple photos. The media exposure spread the word that the U.S. was interested in improving the level of basketball in Sri Lanka and forging ties to all sectors of society, not just the elites. These articulate and talented young men were exactly what was needed to reach a new, younger audience, students and players already asking us when the next set of envoys will come. Many thanks also to ECA's Brian Sexton for his patience, flexibility and understanding of the local culture.

LUNSTEAD